

# far east



MAGAZINE OF THE COLUMBAN MISSIONARIES



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of nuclear war

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## THE FAR EAST

Published seven times yearly by the Missionary Society of St Columban (Maynooth Mission to China).

## THE PURPOSE OF THE FAR EAST IS

To promote an awareness of the missionary dimension of the Church among readers; to report on the work of Columban priests, Sisters and lay missionaries; and to seek spiritual and material support for missionaries.

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£10 a year.  
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News, reports, reflections etc.  
www.columbans.co.uk  
www.columbansisters.org

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### Front Cover

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*They were young and vibrant  
full of awe  
they waved him off to war to end all wars.  
One a young wife, the other a younger sister.  
Sixty years later in a tunnel of fog they stand  
in a bare isolated flowerless field called the Somme  
heads bowed  
shoulders drooping  
as if being held upright by his memory  
they share their loss.  
They remember him.*

## REMEMBERING

The picture in the newspaper on Remembrance Sunday of the wife and sister of an English soldier standing in the fog on a barren field in Europe depicted a side of the horror which was the 1914-18 war that seldom is thought about.

They, as young girls, saw him off with pride and awe to fight a war to end all wars only never to see him again or to find out where he fell. They were left behind to a life of wondering. There was no gravestone to his memory, his body was not recovered. He became a list on a wall.

The effects of war are multiple. Death, destruction, the breakdown of the social order, disabled men, broken women and families, bereft communities, abandoned children, refugees.

Johnny Higgins was married to my grandaunt, my mother's aunt. We used to visit them frequently in the 1950s. Johnny's speech was blurred and as children we found it hard to understand him. When we asked our mother why this was, she answered that he was in the war.

But that didn't explain the blurred speech. Later, when we got older and having been asked again as to the cause of his indistinct speech, my mother explained that the Germans had used

gas in the war. Blurred speech was one of the effects of the gas in soldiers. In most instances it was death.

Johnny Higgins emigrated to the United States as a young man. He was called up for national service and was sent to France to fight on the side of the Allies against Germany. He was invalided out of the war and sent home to the United States disabled. Overcoming his disability, he received a pension and returned to Ireland. He married my grandaunt and settled down to farming. He never talked about the war.

When he died, two American soldiers arrived for his funeral and draped his coffin in the American flag.

The Syrian government has used gas against its own people many times since the civil war began, the most deadly being the Sarin attack in Ghouta in August 2013. This was done even though the use of gas has been outlawed by various conventions. Do we ever learn? ●

Fr Bobby Gilmore

01. American gun crew from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, firing a French 37mm cannon in World War I action in Belleau Wood, 3 June 1918. Image: Shutterstock.





# AN UNEQUAL

The pandemic, writes Columban missionary Sr Anne Carbon, has shown how unequal our world is, particularly for those suffering with a mental illness.

Every 10<sup>th</sup> of October, World Mental Health Day, memories of my experience in Peru working with people who were mentally ill come to the fore. Those years were a privileged time for me because I was able to hear, see and hold the sacred stories of individuals and their loved ones coping with the ordeal of mental illness.

Though mental illness is considered a long-term illness, unfortunately it is often neglected in health care and it doesn't get the attention it merits. The sad reality is that in the developing world, psychiatric services are often sidelined.

We are living in a very unjust world! The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that. While in some countries people are already receiving their second booster dose of the vaccine, millions of people in developing countries haven't even received their first dose. The pandemic has affected us all in many ways. No one was prepared for it. It has been a time of so much uncertainty and much soul-searching. We were ushered into this situation without

wanting it - into a liminal space.

We can relate to Fr Richard Rohr's observation: "We grapple from leaving and entering into a new way of being and we are hesitant to step into an open space of threshold that leads to nowhere." Many times I found it challenging to accept this invitation to pause and let things be, when the circumstances and the reality around me demanded the opposite.

Lately, I have noticed that the number of beggars in Pakistan has increased. I see the faces of children, young people, women, men and older people - as well as the physically and mentally challenged. Today, I went to the market to buy fruit and some essential things for our house. I was surrounded quickly by more than five people, begging for food and medicine. I could see the desperation in their eyes, their emaciated look - they were in pain and hungry. To start giving the fruit to them would cause ten more to immediately appear.

I felt ashamed and so uncomfortable, carrying away the food and not sharing





# WORLD

with them as I wanted to. In a way I was grateful that I was wearing a face mask so as to hide my shame, frustration, and the tears in my eyes. I know that billions of our brothers and sisters have been pushed to the margins, the forgotten, hungry victims of our unjust world. Every one of us has a responsibility to address these disparities. It will take a concerted effort by organisations, humanitarian groups and individuals.

In my own little way, I can only embrace my helplessness, vulnerability and frustration in the light of faith. I trust God to give me the wisdom and the grace to offer love and compassion to those around me who are suffering and in great need. World Mental Health Day reminds us in a special way of those who are suffering from mental health issues and those who are suffering from all forms of inequality. May we continue to be more conscious of how we live and strive to promote life around us knowing how interconnected we all are. Let us live by Mahatma Gandhi's aphorism: "To live simply so that others may simply live." ●



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Sr Anne Carbon is from Cayagan de Oro, Mindanao, in the Southern Philippines. She studied nursing before she joined the Columbans and has a particular interest in the field of mental health. She has served on mission in Peru and Pakistan.



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- 01. A blind man and two women begging at a church door in Laguna, Philippines. Image: Shutterstock
- 02. "The pandemic has affected us all in many ways. No one was prepared for it. It has been a time of so much uncertainty and much soul-searching." Image: Shutterstock
- 03. Columban missionary, Sr Anne Carbon.
- 04. Official logo of World Mental Health Day.

## THE THEME OF WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY THIS YEAR WAS 'MAKE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING FOR ALL A GLOBAL PRIORITY'.

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# NONVIOLENCE OR NON-EXISTENCE?

Fr Patrick Cunningham is a member of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative and the Catholic Solidarity Movement for Peace on the Korean peninsula. He argues that the ongoing threat of nuclear war means choosing between nonviolence and non-existence.

**A**s a Columban working in South Korea, my mission has challenged me to be a peacemaker. My own path has led me to endorse and support the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, a project of the worldwide Catholic peace movement, Pax Christi International. I participate in that movement to promote nonviolence in people's struggle for justice and peace around the world.

To paraphrase Martin Luther King, the choice is no longer between war and peace, or violence and nonviolence. Rather, with the cataclysmic impact of climate change, loss of biodiversity and the constant threat of nuclear war, the only choice that remains is between nonviolence and non-existence.

If we refrain from violence against creation, mother nature in her wonderful generosity will provide all living beings with shelter, food, water and adequate oxygen to ensure a flourishing and a sustainable way of life for all God's

creatures.

I am a regular visitor to the village of Gangjeong on the island of Jeju, off the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula: the unwilling host of a highly controversial naval base. Villagers from Gangjeong have consistently opposed the construction of the base since 2007 and participated in a highly organised 15-year protest.

At this protest, I join other peacemakers outside the military base for the daily, early morning '100-bow' prayer vigil. It is a plea for the life and peace of Gangjeong. Each one of the 100 bows is, fundamentally, a solemn vow and promise to engage in nonviolent resistance against the destruction of the local environment and ongoing militarisation.

It is a physically challenging ritual, involving kneeling and then leaning forward until the forehead touches the ground. Participants in this vigil hold that posture as they offer a prayer, and then





rise to their feet. They repeat this 100 times. It really tests my creaking bones, but every time I have prayed with this group, I feel refreshed and revitalised by the knowledge that all the participants are stubbornly declaring a resounding 'no' to preparation for war.

The Gangjeong community has continued to inspire me with its global awareness. While lamenting the monstrosity that is the naval base in their village, they have added their voices to calls seeking a suspension of the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) in Hawaii, held biannually over a two-week period in August. These naval and missile exercises involve South Korea and as many as 25 other countries. Controversially, a call has also gone out for Taiwan to join. The naval manoeuvres and explosives not only wreak a huge toll on marine life, but also ratchet up international tensions in the South China Sea.

The war games continue to grow in size, despite the many calls for their de-escalation. The United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, together with Pope Francis, has been vocal in calling for a de-escalation in military build-up and all preparation for war.

People around the world are calling for a peace treaty and an immediate conclusion to the war that has never ended

in Korea. The people only have a tenuous non-aggression armistice between the lands to the north and south of the Demilitarised Zone, which divides the two Koreas, to protect them from an outbreak of blazing violence.

The unstable armistice and system of division have brought great pain and suffering to the people and turned the divided peninsula into one of the most highly militarised areas of the world, while significantly propelling the international nuclear arms race.

The people of the Korean Peninsula have lived under the constant threat of war and destruction for over 70 years, while witnessing endless military exercises. Ironically, a positive consequence of the pandemic was a welcome reduction in tension and a scaling back of annual war exercises.

I would like to draw on a message I read recently. "The planet does not need more successful people. The planet desperately needs more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of all kinds." Over my years as a Columban missionary and priest, it has been my privilege to know and work with some of them. I salute them with a heartfelt, "Thank you." ●

Fr Patrick Cunningham is from Moate, Co Westmeath. He was ordained in 1995. He is the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Co-ordinator for the Columban missionaries in South Korea.

01. Fr Pat Cunningham and other peacemakers express their opposition to the naval base in the village of Gangjeong in Korea.

Photo: Fr Pat Cunningham

02. Fr Pat Cunningham with posters that call for an end to war preparation and adherence to the peace treaties that have already been signed. Photo: Fr Pat Cunningham

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# FIJI FAREWELLS FR JJ

Fr Donal McIlraith pays tribute to Fr John Joseph Ryan's tireless service to the people of Fiji and the Pacific and recalls a special farewell service.

It was just before midday on Holy Thursday when the Archbishop called to say he would be around shortly to say farewell to Fr JJ. Some time later, Archbishop Peter Loy Chong of Suva arrived accompanied by his Vicar General Fr Sulio Turagakadivi and some others. They honoured Fr JJ with a traditional Fijian farewell, offering him a *Tabua*, a whale's tooth, the most precious Fijian cultural symbol of respect, as well as some *Kava*.

Fr Sulio acted as the Archbishop's herald and spoke for him. Those in higher positions do not speak in the Fijian - and Pacifican - culture but have a herald to represent them. In presenting the *Tabua*, Fr Sulio mentioned the thirty

years' service Fr JJ had given to Fiji, both at the seminary and as parish priest of Labasa, and thanked him for his tireless service to the people of Fiji and the Pacific. It was a very moving moment for us all and particularly for Fr JJ.

Born in Limerick, Fr John Joseph Ryan was ordained in Dalgan in 1961. He was immediately dispatched to Spain to study canon law. He later moved to Rome to complete his doctorate in this subject. The next few years were spent teaching in Dalgan, the Columban seminary in Ireland. We older Columbans had him as lecturer.

Fr JJ then went to Tübingen in Germany and did another doctorate; this time in systematic theology under the well-known theologian Fr Walter Kasper, now a curial cardinal in Rome. On completion of his doctorate, he was offered the possibility of teaching in Tübingen, but on writing to Columban Central Administration for instructions, he was told to go to Suva and teach there instead.

The Pacific Regional Seminary in Suva was set up in 1972. Fr JJ arrived in 1973 to teach and he was also the first Dean of the Seminary. He taught there for ten years. Fr Fred Kado SM, one of the first group of seminarians and now a parish priest in Suva said of Fr JJ, "He brought an

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academic rigour to our lives that woke us all up." During these years he also set up the Marriage Tribunal for CEPAC, the Bishops' Conference of the South Pacific based in Suva.

His next stop was Sydney. He was asked to move there to teach at both the Columban seminary in Turramurra and the Marist Seminary at Hunter's Hill. He also taught at the Pacific Mission Institute (PMI). This offered renewal courses for returning missionaries from Australia and all over the Pacific. He eventually became the Director of PMI. These Institutes all closed just before the millennium and Fr JJ opted to return to Fiji, this time to Labasa. He left behind him a lot of contented students in Australia as indicated by the numbers who still keep in contact with him.

Labasa is the second city on the second largest of Fiji's 330 islands, Vanua Levu. There he joined Fr Martin Dobey, one of the pioneers who started the Fiji mission in 1952, and had been a Director of the Region several times. Fr JJ took over as parish priest of Labasa and laboured tirelessly there for 20 years. His most faithful helper in these years was Mr Joseva Vasakula who stood valiantly at his side in good times and in bad. Eventually he moved on to emeritus status when Fr Paul Tierney took over as parish priest.

Early in 2021, he moved to Suva for a short break but became locked down there due to Covid. Inter-island travel was forbidden. We celebrated his Diamond Jubilee on 20 December 2021. His health had become precarious following

a touch of pneumonia, and we were extremely worried for him. With the help of a dedicated full-time caregiver, Maria Turagaulu, he regained his health which enabled him to travel to Ireland.

At the farewell, Archbishop Peter Loy Chong shared lunch with Fr JJ after the Kava ceremony. Years before, they had been neighbouring parish priests in Vanua Levu and they had much in common. The archdiocesan media crew interviewed Fr JJ. "What abiding memory have you of Fiji," they asked. His answer came quickly, "The amazing resilience of the Fijian people."

On Easter Monday, the eve of his departure, the chairman of the Labasa parish, Fr Iosafu Raonu, arrived with a delegation from Labasa to farewell Fr JJ. It was a happy occasion. As we bid farewell to Fr JJ from the South Pacific, we were reminded of Mark 10:45: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." ●

Fr Donal McIlraith was ordained in 1971 and missioned in Japan and Fiji. A former regional director, he has also taught scripture at the Pacific Regional Seminary. He currently oversees Mission Awareness and Education in Fiji.

01. Fr Sulio Turagakadivi, Vicar General and Herald for Archbishop Peter Loy Chong of Suva, offers *Tabua*, a whale's tooth, the most precious Fijian cultural symbol of respect, to Fr JJ.
02. Fr JJ and Columbans, Fr Donal McIlraith and Fr John McEvoy, with the Labasa delegation.
03. Fr JJ drinking Kava with the Labasa delegation.
04. The celebration of Fr JJ's 84<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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# PRAYING UNDER THE SHADOW OF AN ANCIENT GINKGO TREE

The 23<sup>rd</sup> of November is a special day in the Columban calendar. It is the Feast of St Columbanus and it is also the birthday of Columban co-founder, Bishop Edward Galvin. Fr Dan Troy writes about a religious order in China which was founded by Bishop Galvin and has survived to this day despite many challenges.

In Wuhan, central China, where I live, I frequently visit the Sisters of Our Lady of Hanyang, a diocesan congregation founded by Bishop Edward Galvin, co-founder of Missionary Society of St Columban. Their convent is located right beside St Columban's Cathedral, a short distance from the spot where the Han River enters the much bigger Yangtze River.

Almost as impressive as the Yangtze River is the towering 550-year-old ginkgo tree that stands across the road from the convent. Under its shadow lies the original hospital run by the Missionary Sisters of St Columban until the late 1940s, now part of an expanded complex known as the Wuhan Number 5 Hospital. During the pandemic, this hospital was designated to receive patients suffering from Coronavirus.

Hanyang's famous ginkgo tree has witnessed many historical events. Dynasties have come and gone, floods have risen and abated, and wars have taken their toll on the people. Now, the tree is witnessing the Coronavirus. This latest healthcare event poses as big a challenge as any before.

Considering its venerable age and all that it has survived, it is no surprise that the tree is now protected in a neat compound. An elderly couple living in a small house at the compound entrance ensures that the tree and its history live on.

One of the events the tree witnessed was the floods of 1931. After prolonged summer rain, combined with torrents of meltwater from snow on the heights of the faraway Himalayas, the Yangtze River burst its banks in Wuhan and many areas outside the city. Refugees from devastated rural areas moved to Wuhan in the hope of finding relief.

But in a city struggling to cope with floodwater, taking care of refugees was deemed a task beyond its capacity. Acutely aware of the desperation of the newly arrived refugees, Bishop Edward Galvin began coordinating a relief effort. This involved providing shelter, basic food supplies, and medical care for tens of thousands of people.

For some, the only available accommodation was in small tents as they huddled together on Black Hill, a mound of ground that still stands beside the Han River as a silent reminder of that terrifying time. With limited resources and only boats to transport supplies, the 1931 relief efforts gradually became established thanks to all available Church personnel becoming involved, including a group of teenage girls.

The dynamic role these young Catholics took on







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considerably bolstered the relief efforts, and their contribution warmed the heart of Bishop Galvin in a way that was to prove providential. After six months, as the flood relief effort reached a gradual conclusion, Bishop Galvin began preparing the way for the founding of a new diocesan congregation of Sisters.

The first members of the new congregation came from the teenagers who had shown such selfless dedication during the flood relief efforts. Then in the late 1940s, political upheaval forced a tearful bishop to advise the Sisters to go home to their families and, if they wished, get married. Their departure from the convent was a day of bitter sorrow for all.

Forty years later, as if to prove that nothing is impossible for God, eight of these women returned to Hanyang one by one and began living in a simple residence within the parish compound. A few years later, the church reopened.

In the years following 2001, I often shared meals with five of these elderly Sisters at their convent. They were undoubtedly women of deep faith who had seen the full range of possibilities that life can put before anyone. Their humility and trust in God's ongoing protection in the face of extraordinary historical events could only be admired.

A few years ago, the last remaining Sister of that generation, Sr Li Fenfang, died. She was 99 years old. As if to underline how God does work in mysterious ways, the life of the congregation continues through a younger generation of Sisters who joined since the mid-1990s and now provide dedicated care for older Sisters as age becomes an increasing factor.

During the peak of the Coronavirus in Wuhan, the younger members of the Sisters of Our Lady of Hanyang looked across the road at the hospital where patients were being treated. Living under the same restrictions of movement imposed on everybody else throughout the city, they could not become directly involved in the care of patients or their families.

Nonetheless, the Sisters found a way to contribute. Some parishioners had family members who had contracted the virus. The Sisters supported them through regular communication and contacted friends to seek financial support for projects connected with the medical emergency.

Faithful to their commitment as a congregation, they also committed themselves to extended hours of prayer for those most affected by the Coronavirus, sometimes praying throughout the night. While living with restrictions was unavoidable, the location of the Sisters' convent so close to the hospital has given their prayerful presence a deep symbolism.

Each day the Sisters' prayers merge with the prayers of so many other people. Through it all, Hanyang's impressive ginkgo tree, stands calmly like a silent witness to the hive of urgent medical activity a short distance away.

We rejoiced and gave thanks to God as the growth of new leaves on this giant tree coincided with a turning of the tide in this latest challenging chapter in the history of central China. The leaves emerged, and the tide did eventually turn in the city of Wuhan. ●

Columban missionary Fr Dan Troy is from Co Cork. He qualified as a civil engineer before he joined the Columbans. He was ordained in 1999. Since 2000 he has lived and worked in China.



01. Fr Dan Troy (6<sup>th</sup> from left) with some of the Hanyang Sisters in May 2021 and Pablo Leahy Gomez, a staff member of the Irish Embassy in Beijing. The photo was taken in the dining room of the Sisters' convent. On the wall behind the group is a photo of Bishop Edward Galvin, co-founder of the Columban Fathers and founder of the Sisters of Our Lady of Hanyang, as well as a 1933 photo of Bishop Galvin with the some of the first Sisters.

Photo: Fr Dan Troy.

02. Bishop Edward Galvin with some of the first members of the Sisters of Our Lady of Hanyang. Sr Paula Wu is on Bishop Galvin's left.

Photo: Columban Archives.

03. Fr Joe Deegan (Diocese of Meath and a former AITECE teacher in China), Elizabeth Kennedy (New Zealand teacher in China), Fr Dan Troy and some Hanyang Sisters in a photo taken in January 2018.

04. Sr Justa teaches postulants the constitutions of the Sisters of Our Lady of Hanyang.

05. The Sisters of Our Lady of Hanyang in a 2005 photo.

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# A CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARY

Fr Pat Visanti is a Columban missionary from Rotuma, a Polynesian island in Fiji. On a recent visit home, he spoke to Fr Frank Hoare about some of his experiences of being on mission in Pakistan.

**W**hen Pakistani people first meet me wearing a *shalwar kameez* (long shirt with loose fitting trousers) they think that I am a Pathan, from the north of Pakistan. A Pathan seller in the market last Christmas was packing stuff for me and asked me, "What place in the north are you from?" I explained to him that I am not Pakistani. We laughed together.

At a military checkpoint a soldier got on the bus I was travelling on. He began talking to me. I didn't understand a single word. Realising that there was a problem he asked for my ID. He looked at me and said, "So you are not Pakistani!" We both started laughing. I heard then that he had been speaking in Pashto, the language of the Pathans.

The toughest thing in Pakistan for me is the culture. It is different. It takes a while to learn why they do what they do. If one doesn't learn to like the culture, forget about working here. I have come to appreciate the Muslim religion. I admire the way Muslims pray five times a day. Sometimes I feel ashamed. They pray when they hear the call to prayer.

We struggle to do our prayers. It is a challenge. We can learn good things from each other.

There are three mosques near our church compound. We have a good relationship with the nearest mosque and their loudspeakers are no longer facing in towards us. It can be crazy when they go off. One of the *maulvi's* (a Muslim doctor of law) daughters is teaching in our school for the last 25 years. She attends many of our programmes. We have Muslim friends with whom we work.

Interreligious dialogue is easy where Christians are in the majority. In Pakistan, Muslims are in the majority, so you have to do things on their terms. Christian-Muslim dialogue happens in our daily interactions with people. I found it hard to approach people in the beginning but as my language skills improved, I was able to chat to them.

In our parish of Badin in southern Pakistan we have a TB clinic because TB is a big issue in Pakistan - children as young as one suffer from it. The people live in poor conditions - the water is not clean





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and the sewage system is not good. At the TB clinic we try to educate people about hygiene. About 60 to 70 people come to the clinic every morning from Monday to Saturday. A small fee of about 20 cents is charged so that they feel they are contributing. Two employees do outreach in the villages on Thursdays, following up on patients who have stopped coming to the clinic.

We have an ambulance in the parish which I normally drive. One day I drove the ambulance to bring six Sisters to the parish to experience the tribal apostolate. I met them at the train station dressed in overalls. "So, you are the driver," they asked. "Yes, I am the ambulance driver." Only when we reached the church did they learn that I was a priest.

We have a primary and secondary school with about 460 students in the church compound. During the Covid outbreak the classes were divided with half coming on successive days to achieve social distancing. Every student went to school three days a week. Masks and hand sanitation were obligatory. Most of the teachers are Catholic but there are more Muslim students than Catholic students. Our Christians are spoiled! At enrolment Muslims and Hindus fight to get a place at the school. But we have to announce the registration over and over at Mass to get our Christians to enrol their children. They think that they own the school!

Some of our Catholics abuse Columban and Church generosity. If they come to me, I ask them questions. There are

genuine cases of course, but there are chancers too. One guy asked for 22,000 Rupees (around US\$100) because he was preparing to harvest his mango orchards. He came twice to me, but I said no. A week later he came to the TB clinic and asked for the fare for a patient in the village who needed to go to Karachi. He asked for 22,000 Rupees. We called the patient and were told that his clinic was in one month's time, and he had no knowledge that this fellow was asking for money on his behalf!

But despite all that, I really enjoy being in Pakistan. I love all aspects of life there. ●

Fr Frank Hoare is from Ireland. He has been on mission in Fiji since 1973 and has been a member of the Regional Council and involved in Student Formation.

01. Columban missionary Fr Pat Visanti, who has been working in Pakistan since his ordination in 2017, in *shalwar kameez*, with some friends.
02. Born and raised a Methodist on the island of Rotuma, which is ethnically and linguistically different to Fiji, Fr Pat is seen here sitting on a *charpai* bed in a Pakistani village of the tribal Pakhari Khohli.
03. Fr Pat at a Pakhari Khohli wedding.

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# MISSION AND SYNODALITY

Mission is one of the three themes proposed for the Universal Synod in 2023, along with Communion and Participation. Columban Fr Hugh MacMahon explains how the Synodal Process has a deep missionary dimension to it.

When Cardinal Mario Grech, General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, addressed the Irish bishops in September 2021, he began by saying he had the feeling that, like Pope Francis, the Irish bishops are “dreaming a mission option,” gearing up to take on a missionary attitude and help the Church in Ireland to go out and reach the fringes of humanity.

As one whose life has been involved in mission I was intrigued. How did he see mission and how did he think we can live and practise it in Ireland today?

Mission is one of the three themes proposed for the Synod, along with Communion and Participation. The preparatory document for the Synod on Synodality explains it as follows: “The Church exists to evangelise. We can never be centred on ourselves. Our mission is to witness the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process has a deep missionary dimension to it. It is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world.”

This is an imaginative challenge, considering recent events in Ireland and

Britain. Yet the Synod is precisely about helping us face the modern situation and indicates how it is to be done. When he gave his homily at the solemn Mass to open the Synodal Process on 10 October 2021, Pope Francis began by quoting the gospel of the day in which a rich young man came up to Jesus “as he was setting out on his journey.” Pope Francis noted that Jesus was frequently “on a journey”, listening to the questions and concerns of people along the way. For us too the way forward is to ‘journey’. Like Jesus, “we too are called to become experts in the art of encounter.”

I could appreciate what he was saying. During my time in Korea and China anything I learnt of value came from ‘going out’. I had to journey to get out there, to join language schools, to attend seminars and find helpful books. Later I had to go out of my parish house to encounter the people of the locality in order to understand their background and justify myself as a missionary. From those ‘goings out’ I was able to begin finding with others the answers and solutions I was looking for.

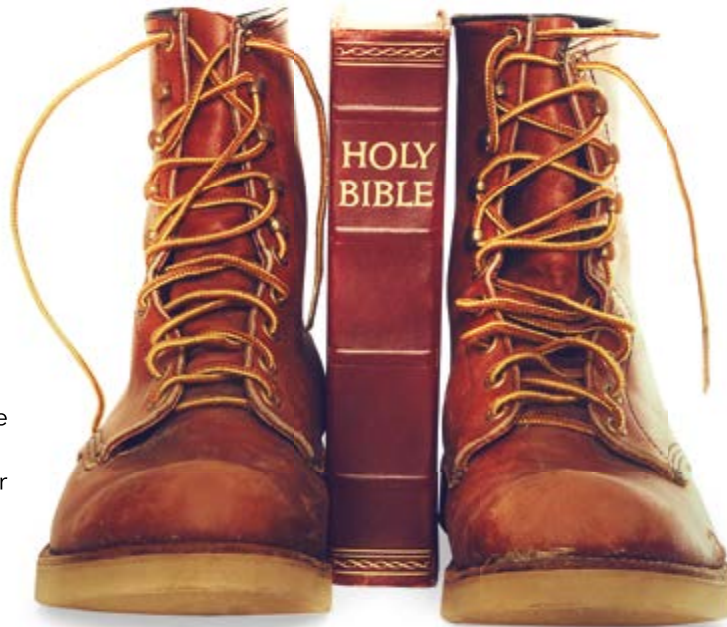
Pope Francis urges us to “become experts in the art of encounter” and you don’t become an expert overnight.



When I first arrived in Korea I thought I knew what people really needed and how to provide it for them. It was only when my knowledge of the language allowed me to 'encounter' the people that I discovered how much I had to re-consider. What did the Christian message really mean to me? How could I express it, even for myself? How could I find the words and actions that would help people understand what I was talking about?

These are the challenges that face all Christians who are trying to make sense of their own faith today, not to say organising it in such a way as to be able to share it with others and join them in doing God's work. Pope Francis is telling us that our mission in life can be achieved only by engaging with others. Those who do not think like ourselves are especially valuable because they lead us to consider aspects of life we never considered before. He adds that we also need a support group - people who are into the same search as ourselves, asking the same questions and referring back to the bible and Church tradition to get the background knowledge we need to build on.

If possible this should take place in a parish setting, along with those who form the local Church with us. Eventually it should lead us to doing something together, in the words of Pope Francis, "to better witness to the Gospel, especially



Fr Hugh MacMahon was ordained in 1962 and spent fifty years on mission in Korea and China. He returned to Ireland in 2012 and was Executive Secretary of the Irish Missionary Union until 2016. His most recent book is 'Voices from the Desert: The Lost Legacy of the Skelligs', published by Columba Books.

02

with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world."

On coming back to Ireland after spending many years on the other side of the world, I was struck by how few 'ordinary' Catholics feel able to stand up in public and state in simple language the Church's values and position. In my missionary efforts it took me a long time to accept that what I thought I knew about myself, others and the Church was not enough. My regret is that it took so long for me to learn that. At that time there was no one telling me that I had to 'go out' to meet God in other people.


The Pope is taking away this excuse from us. He is telling us to become 'experts in the art of encounter', to get involved with others to deepen our own faith and enable us to contribute together to God's work for the world. The synodal approach guides the way. The journey re-starts. ●

01. "We also need a support group - people who are into the same search as ourselves, asking the same questions and referring back to the bible and Church tradition ... If possible this should take place in a parish setting, along with those who form the local Church with us."

Image: Shutterstock.

02. Pope Francis has noted that Jesus was frequently "on a journey", listening to the questions and concerns of people along the way. For us too the way forward is to 'journey'. Image: Shutterstock.






# MAKING YOUR WILL?

## MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Please remember the needs of Columban missionaries and their missions.

Without your help we cannot continue our work.

Your gift could help some of the most marginalised and neediest.



Missionary Society of St Columban, Widney Manor Road, Knowle, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9AB.



# JUBILEES 2022

Diamond 75  
Jubilee Sisters YEARS

Sr Joan O'Donovan



Peru, Chile, Ireland

Platinum 70  
YEARS

Fr Cyril Murphy



Japan, Britain, Ireland

Fr Michael Doohan



Philippines, Ireland

Platinum 70  
Jubilee Sisters YEARS

Sr Rose Dineen



Korea, USA

Sr Eileen Roe



Peru, Ireland

Diamond 60  
YEARS

Fr Joseph Cahill



Korea, USA, Ireland

Fr Neil Collins



Philippines, Ireland

Fr Tom Cusack



Philippines, USA

Fr Gerald French



Korea, Britain, Ireland

Fr John Hogan



Korea, USA, Ireland

Fr Hugh MacMahon



Korea, Hong Kong, Ireland

Fr Michael O'Farrell



Japan, Ireland

Fr Brian Oxley



Korea, Ireland

Fr John Smyth



Korea, USA, Ireland



**Diamond 60**  
Jubilee Sisters YEARS

**Sr Amy Baybay**



Korea, USA

**Sr Corona Colleary**



USA

**Sr Monica Kelly**



Korea, Ireland

**Sr Mary Moylan**



Philippines, England, Ireland

**Sr Joan O'Connor**



China, Hong Kong

**Fr Valentine Kyne**



Philippines, Ireland, USA

**Golden 50**  
YEARS

**Fr John McEvoy**



Fiji, Ireland

**Fr Michael McGuire**



Philippines

**Fr Dan O'Malley**



Philippines, Ireland, Britain

**Golden 50**  
Jubilee Sisters YEARS

**Sr Rose Gallagher**



Peru, Ireland

**Sr Mary McManus**



Philippines, USA

**Silver 25**  
YEARS

**Fr Liam O'Callaghan**



Pakistan

**Fr Vincent Ratnam**



Pakistan, Chile

**Fr Marco Henriquez Rivera**



Pakistan, USA, Chile

**Silver 25**  
Jubilee Sisters YEARS

**Sr Anne Carbon**



Peru, Pakistan



# LISTENING AND MISSION



Fr Trevor Trotter considers listening to be critical to both mission and our synodal journey.



Ordained in 1970, Fr Trevor Trotter spent time on mission in the Philippines and Hong Kong, where he served on the General Council. He has lectured in Scripture in Sydney and the US. He is currently Regional Director of the Columbans in Oceania.

01. The first Columbans to go on mission to China. They were photographed in the US.  
**Front Row:** Michael McHugh, Edward J Galvin, John Blowick, John Dawson.  
**Second Row:** Thomas Quinlan, Owen MacPolin, Richard Ranaghan, Edward J O'Doherty, John P. O'Brien, Cornelius Tierney, Timothy Leonard, Matthew Dolan.  
**Rear:** Joseph Crossan, Alphonsus Ferguson, Arthur McGuinness, William O'Flynn, Michael Mee.  
 Image: Columban archives.
02. Frs Owen MacPolin, John Blowick, and Edward J Galvin in Shanghai in 1920. Image: Columban archives.

Over a hundred years ago, a small group of Irish priests working in China decided they needed to listen to what God wanted them to do. I think it is amazing that they would expect God to speak to them. How can you listen to someone unless they speak to you? These men had the desire to live according to what God wanted and must have known from past experience that, if they prayed and listened to God, they would be able to discover God's wish for them. We call this the process of discernment.

They came together and decided they would make a novena. They set aside nine days of prayer during which they asked God to help them decide whether they would go back to Ireland and set up the Columban Mission Society. By the end of the nine days, they must have been fairly convinced that God was calling them to do precisely this. To confirm their thinking, one man suggested they 'cut the Bible'. This was a custom in his family when faced with such decisions. They opened the Bible and Joshua 1:6 read, "Be strong and stand firm."

We can learn a lot from this experience. There was no clear directive from God, but these words touched something within their hearts, within their spirits, at that time. It was the Spirit of God within them that spoke through the experience of reading that verse. We've all had that experience. We can be reading the Gospel or hear it being read at Mass, and a few words touch us strongly. We may have heard that verse many times before but passed over it. On that specific day, however, it has an impact on us. God is speaking to us through our experience of the text.

If we are not paying attention to the response within ourselves, we will miss

what God is trying to communicate to us. God speaks to us in many, many ways. We believe that the Spirit of God is leading the Church. We believe that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who guides his flock. When we look to the New Testament and especially in the Acts of the Apostles, we see how the Spirit leads Christian communities in mission. Here, God is not just speaking to an individual or a small group; the whole community is listening to what the Spirit has to say. As the Spirit is working through every individual, it is important to listen to what each person has to say. What the quietest person in the room says may be exactly what the group needs to hear.

If we read how the early Christians gathered in Jerusalem for the first synod, we can see how they listened to God. In the letter they sent to the Christians in Antioch, they say, "It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves..." Obviously, the people in the synod discussed the issue. They thought about it. They reflected on their experiences and tried to address the issue of what Jewish practices the new Christian converts from non-Jewish religions should follow. In other words, the people in the synod had to use their normal, God-given talents of thinking, remembering, and debating, along with inspiration from the Holy Spirit to come to their conclusions.

It is the same for us as individuals and as members of the Church. We want to be able to say, "It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by us..." We can only do this by listening deeply to what other people are saying. We also have to listen deeply to what is happening within ourselves and to what we believe the Spirit is saying. Listening is critical to mission. ●



# NOVEMBER: A THIN PLACE

**A** 'Thin Place' according to the late Irish philosopher and poet John O'Donohue is a place or time where heaven and earth meet and we have access to 'light' or the beyond in a different way. It is a threshold experience where time and eternity embrace.

John O'Donohue was steeped in the Celtic tradition and opened up for us the Celtic world, inviting us to enter and take note of times and places where the 'veil' between the seen and unseen world is thinner than at other times. During this 'liminal' time, we experience a greater sense of sacredness or presence of the Other in a deeper way as the distance between heaven and earth, darkness and light, past and future becomes porous momentarily.

November is such a liminal time within our liturgical calendar. The mood of this season is set as nature seemingly rests and sleeps having shed all its autumnal beauty and the sky sports a bleak dark grey tone in the Northern Hemisphere. It captures the Celtic idea of November as a 'thin place'. The month of November/*Samhain* in the Celtic calendar is thought to have represented the Celtic New Year.

All Saints, All Souls and Halloween invite us beyond our present reality into reaching out in love as we remember those who have gone before us whether saint or sinner. In some countries on All Souls Day, transport is hired to take people to the places where the remains of their loved ones rest, food is shared as the family gathers, with some offered especially for the dead. Prayers are said for the repose of their souls, Masses are offered and it becomes a family outing and a celebration of life.

The liturgy of these days tells us that life is changed not ended, the 'thin place' becomes a place of bonding in love. Our loved ones have "only gone to God and God is very near".

The Bible too speaks of thin places. We see where Moses (Exodus 3) met God in the Burning Bush and God spoke, and also Elijah (1 Kings 19) met God on top of a mountain and heard Him in the still small voice. One needs to be truly present to listen and hear. Jesus had similar experiences, for example in His Transfiguration we see where the veil was lifted temporarily

and the voice of the Father spoke saying: "This is my Beloved Son, listen to Him". The ultimate thin place for Jesus was Calvary when the veil was torn and he surrendered His all for our sake.

Thin places are not primarily geographical but a way of being present and listening deeply which enables the veil to fall even for a moment and we experience a touch of heaven. Those who have gone before us have made it beyond the veil and may the Lord accompany us so that we too may participate in "what no one has ever seen, no one has ever heard, no one has ever imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him". (1 Cor: 2: 9). ●

Sr Rebecca Conlon





# REST in PEACE



Sr Patria Nagac Daomilas



Sr Brigid Kingston



Sr Abbie O'Sullivan

**Sr Patria Nagac Daomilas** was born on 20 December 1928 in Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental in the Philippines. She attended the Immaculate Conception College in Ozamiz City for her primary and secondary education. She graduated from the University of Santo Tomas in Manila.

Patria taught at Immaculate Conception High School for a year and then she was invited to teach in Sacred Heart High School in Molave, Zamboanga del Sur. During her stay in Molave she organised the choir and put on operettas. She also started to think of missionary life. In October 1957 she left for Boston, Massachusetts to enter the Columban novitiate. She was professed in 1960 after which she was sent to Chicago to study music at the Conservatory of Music at Mundelein where she took up advanced studies in voice and piano. A year later she was back in the Philippines and was assigned to Lingayen on the island of Luzon and stayed there for 11 years. Other assignments were in our schools in Malasiqui and Labrador both in Pangasinan, Sinacaban and in Ozamiz City both in Misamis Occidental.

While in Ozamiz City she did an MA in Education and Spiritual Renewal in Ireland. She was assigned back to Labrador, Pangasinan. Later she did a degree in music at the Centro Escolar University. In the 1990s she worked with the Columban Fathers on their Mission Awareness Programme, linked with MISION magazine.

When she was no longer active in ministry, Sr Patria moved to our Retirement House. After a short illness, she passed away on 10 March 2022 and was buried at Holy Cross Memorial Park, Manila.

**Sr Brigid Kingston** was born in February 1938 in Maulnageragh, Co Cork. She came from a family of seven; a younger brother also became a Missionary. When Sr Brigid was thirteen years old, two Columban Sisters visited her school to share about their mission work in the Far East, and she was immediately interested. She entered the Columban Sisters in Caheracon in 1956. After her profession she studied nursing in Dublin and in 1966 set off by boat for Hong Kong, where she was missioned for over thirty years. She spent many years caring for poor patients with tuberculosis in Ruttonjee Sanatorium, many of them were refugees from China. Her gentle, caring and kind disposition coupled with a smiling face endeared her to all.

Later she worked in a Caritas Clinic in Ta Kwu Ling, near the China border. She loved to visit the families in the surrounding area and on the way, she would stop and chat to the Hakka women tending to their rice paddies. Before leaving Hong Kong, she spent some time as house mother in a hostel for wayward youngsters.

After her mission in Hong Kong, she spent five years in the Philippines. Leaving the Far East, Sr Brigid spent ten years working in a socially deprived parish in Scotland. It was during these years that she developed health problems. Later she retired to Magheramore where she coped extremely well with her failing health. She died peacefully at the nearby Wicklow Hospice on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2022 and is buried in Magheramore.

**Sr Abbie O'Sullivan** was born in Kilcummin, Co Kerry in 1947. Soon after completing her post primary education at Loreto Killarney, she entered the Columban Sisters in Magheramore in October 1964. After profession she studied at University College Dublin and graduated with a BA Degree and a Higher Diploma in Education.

Her first mission was to the Philippines, where she spent two years, followed by eleven years in Hong Kong. She was an excellent and very committed teacher, much loved by her students.

Returning to Ireland she became involved with the Sisters of Saint Francis in Croatia and taught English in Zagreb for a year.

Her next assignment was in London where she managed a hostel for women, migrant/asylum seekers for the Archdiocese of Westminster. After London she spent some time at home caring for her ageing mother and following this she was assigned to Dublin where she did an impressive job as counsellor in a boy's secondary school. She also rendered some night-time care to the late Cardinal Desmond O'Connell. Abbie did voluntary work at the Capuchin Day Centre and loved the vulnerable people she encountered there, especially people who were lost and needed a friendly connection. Brother Kevin really appreciated her contribution.

Her final assignment was in Magheramore where she was Congregational Archivist as well as Assistant Editor of the **Far East** magazine. She died peacefully at Wicklow Hospice on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2022. *Slán abhaile* Sr Abbie.

**May they rest in peace.**

# THE LOST SHEEP

**J**esus used stories, or parables, to explain God's love for everyone. He often compared God to a shepherd looking after his sheep. One parable he told was this:

There was once a shepherd with a flock of a hundred sheep. Every morning the shepherd led them to places where the grass was good to eat, and every evening led them back down to the safety of the stone sheepfold.

As the sheep entered the sheepfold, the shepherd counted them to make sure they were all there. One evening he only counted ninety-nine sheep. One was missing!

Immediately, the shepherd left the ninety-nine

sheep in the sheepfold and went back up the hillside to search for the one that was lost. For hours he searched. Then, when he found the frightened lamb, he put it across his shoulders and carried it joyfully all the way back to the sheepfold.

When the shepherd finally got home, he was so happy that he called all his family and friends round for a party. "Come and celebrate with me!" he told them. "I have found my lamb that was lost!"

In the same way, Jesus explained, God loves each one of us so much that he rejoices more over one person who comes back to him, than over all the people already safe in his care. ●

**Read also: Luke 15:3-7 or Matthew 18: 10-14**

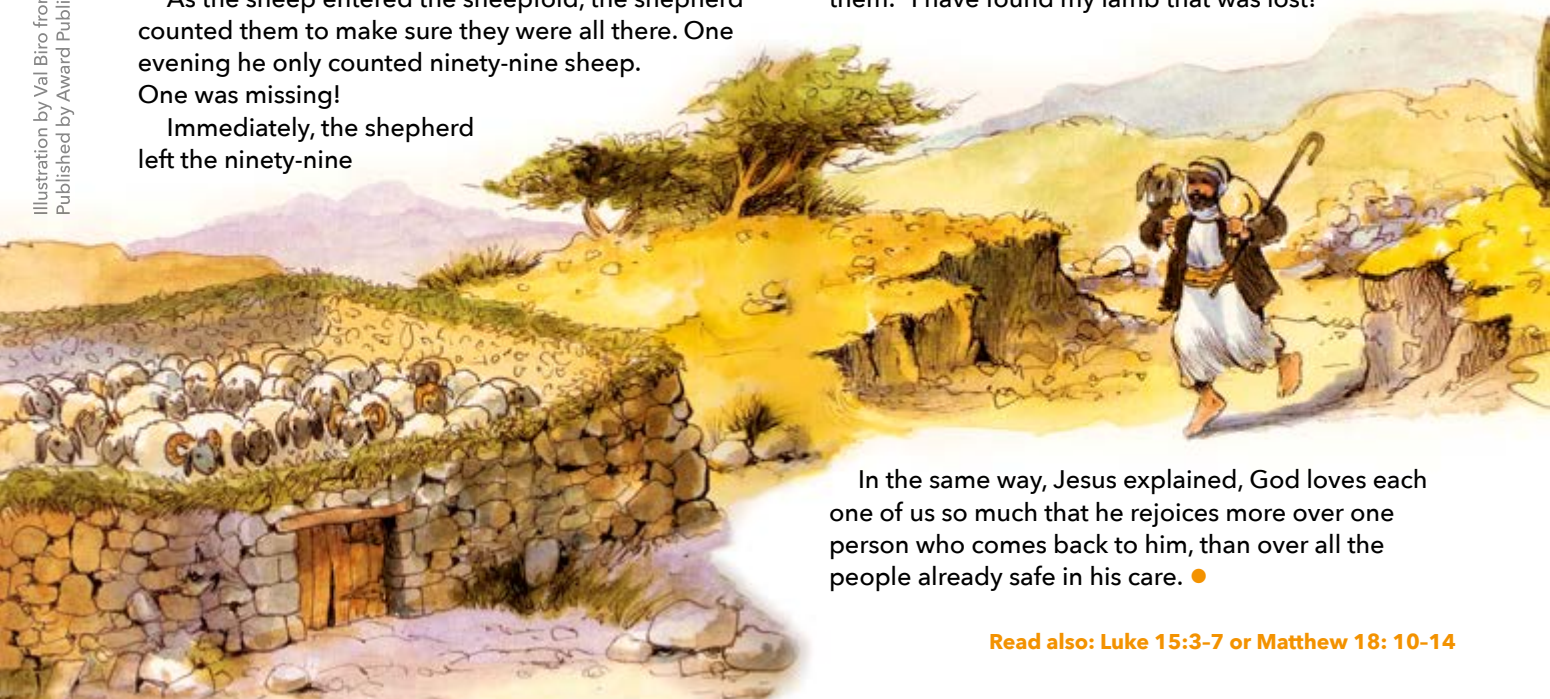


Illustration by Val Biro from One Hundred Bible Stories for Children. Published by Award Publications Ltd.

## BIBLE QUIZ

NUMBER 102

**1** In 2 Kings ch.2, what did Elijah use instead of a stick to make the water of the Jordan move back?

**2** Supply the missing words from Isaiah ch.35: "The desert and the parched land will be glad; the ..... will rejoice and blossom?"

**3** In Deuteronomy ch.31, to whom did Moses say, 'it is you who will lead the people into the land'?

**4** In Exodus ch.16, in which desert were the people when they said to Moses "why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in this terrible place"?

**5** Who, in Judges ch.4, at the command of Deborah gathered his forces on Mount Tabor?

**6** In Ezekiel ch.1, the prophet was by which river when he saw visions of God?

**£15 vouchers for the first three correct entries received!**  
Consult your Bible, answer the questions above and send your entry to: Bible Quiz N° 102, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9AB, before 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

Bible Quiz N° 100 Winners: Amanda Kelly, Coventry • Collette Allwood, Solihull • Anthony Sowden, Swansea

Name:

Address:





# WORD SEARCH

Find these words in the puzzle and discover the hidden word:

- TURKEY
- INDIAN
- MAYFLOWER
- PILGRIM
- CORNUCOPIA
- PUMPKIN

# THANKSGIVING



C	O	R	N	U	C	O
P	T	U	R	P	U	P
I	I	M	K	F	M	I
L	N	A	E	Y	P	A
G	D	Y	F	L	K	I
R	I	A	L	O	A	N
I	M	N	L	W	E	R

## PUDSY'S DIRTY - FIND THE 10 SPELLING MISTAKES

The other day at school Ms Flinn was saying November is a very special month and we must remember why except I cud'nt becasue I was thinking the time Elizabeth came to talk to us, and she's lovely and doesn't get cross or anything, and brings us out to the fields and tell us all about the bugs and bees and things that pollinate and I asked her to show us the crawdads - becos I heard the big cuzzins talking about these things that can sing too. And that's when Elizabeth said for that you'll hafta use your maginations. I

whispered to my fren Bump if he knew what they look like. He said no but maybe they're squiggly and wiggly and have long tales and squeak and everything. And lying out on the grass we might hear them sing too. But then Ms Flinn was looking down at us and saying I hope all are paying attenshun except some seem to be busy otherwise. So do not forget what I have been saying. I sed to bump what'll we do if we have to eggspain what she was talking about. And he said dunno...we'll just have to use our maginations too...



Help Pudsy correct his spelling to win a £15 voucher.

Rewrite the story and send to Pudsy's Dirty, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands B93 9AB, before 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

## HA! HA!

1. What did the tree say to autumn?
2. How do trees get on the internet?
3. What happens when winter arrives?
4. What is the cutest of all seasons?
5. Why did the apple pie cry?
6. What did one autumn leaf say to another?

1. Please leaf me alone!
2. They log in!
3. Autumn leaves!
4. Awwturn!
5. Its peelings were hurt!
6. I'm falling for you!

## COMPETITION WINNERS JULY / AUGUST 2022

<p>Lucie Mae Firth Macclesfield</p> <p>1</p> <p>Colpaint - Aged 7 and Under</p>	<p>Chloe Kevan Liverpool</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Caitlin Dudley, West Midlands</p> <p>1</p> <p>Colpaint - Aged 8 and Over</p>	<p>Reggie Walsh Hertfordshire</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Dexter Walsh Hertfordshire</p> <p>1</p> <p>Pudsy's Dirty</p>
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# Fair Fieldfares

By Elizabeth McArdle



It is November; the days are shorter and the last of the autumn leaves are cascading from the trees. Migratory birds have headed south to warmer climates and sometimes it is hard not to envy them and wish to be with them in the warm sunshine.

Fieldfares, along with other northern birds, also head south to overwinter. It is not to Africa or southern Europe they go as we might assume, but to our part of the world. Having spent their summers busily rearing and caring for their darling chicks in Scandinavia and Siberia, flocks of fieldfares fly south to spend the winter in open fields searching for snails, insects and worms. When the ground freezes, they switch to eating wild berries and fruits.

Normally, these omnivores (creatures that eat both plants and meat) will not dine at our bird tables or on the peanut feeders, but they do love apples. So, put apples outside for them or leave some on the ground, that is if

you have an orchard. When they come, they will add great delight and pizzazz to the winter landscape around your home.

Fieldfares are one of our largest thrushes. Their slate grey heads, dark chestnut backs with long black tails make them very handsome birds indeed. They stand very upright and move forward with purposeful hops. Like humans, they are social creatures and hang out in large flocks. Towards dusk, they congregate to roost together and if a tall hedge or tree is selected, they all face the same direction as they sleep.

How blessed we are to have such special guests visiting us each wintertime. Their presence among us is one of the great joys of the colder season. Keep a look out for fieldfares and you will come across other amazing winter birds. Their wonder will make your heart soar as you give praise to God the creator of all. ●



Image: Shutterstock

## WIN A VOUCHER WORTH £15/£10!

Colpaint★



Colpaint★

Colour the drawing and send it with your name and address to: COLPAINT, St Columban's, Widney Manor Rd, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9AB, before 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

Name:

Age:

Address:

FOUR PRIZES TO BE WON!



# SCHOOLS MEDIA COMPETITION

Columban Missionaries are looking for students (aged 13-18 inclusive) to submit an original piece of writing or an original image on the theme:

- ✓ Is conflict inevitable?
- ✓ Where and how is peacebuilding taking place?
- ✓ What role can faith play in peacemaking?

**"Our proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus challenges us to build communities of peace."**

From the Columban Statement on Peace

**DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES:  
FRIDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2023**

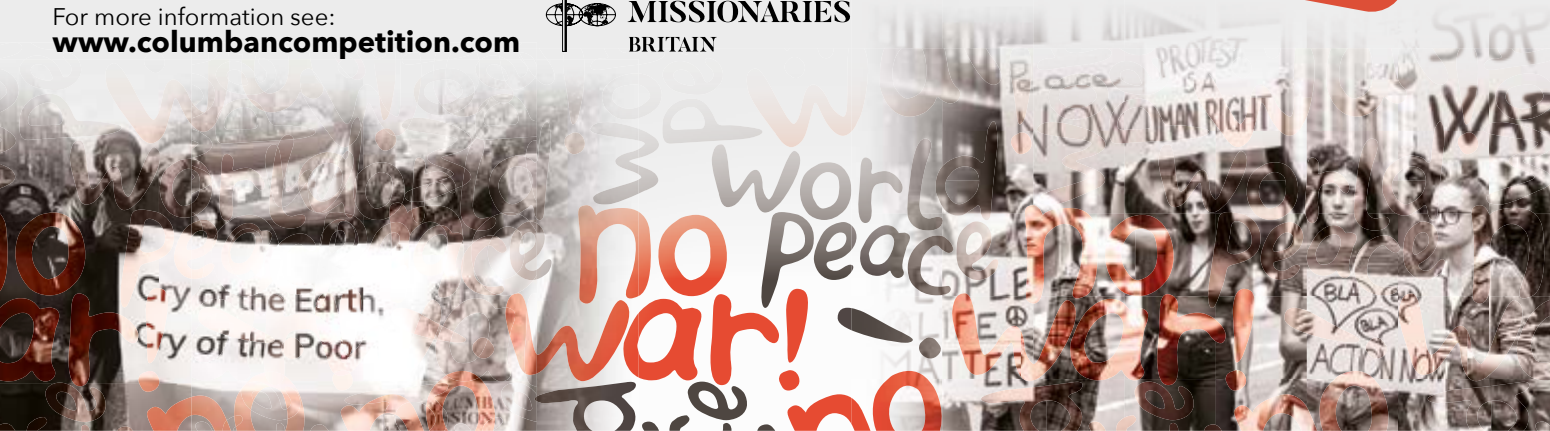
For more information see:  
[www.columbancompetition.com](http://www.columbancompetition.com)

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# SUBANEN CHRISTMAS CARDS

Connecting the nativity story with the story of the Subanen people in the Philippines

The Subanens face eviction from their homes by logging and mining companies. With assistance from the Columbans, they use their traditional crafting skills to make jewellery, mandalas, children's books and cards to sell. The income generated provides food, education, housing and healthcare for their families.

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**FOR**  
**10 CARDS**  
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\* Including VAT. Sold in packs of ten, with envelopes. Postage is £2.95 incl VAT (£3.95 for 3-7 packs). Cheques payable to Columban Missionaries.